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THE WEST SAXON AND KENTISH FIRST PERSON SINGULAR PRESENT INDICATIVE ENDING -E

BY W. F. BRYAN

The ending -e of the first person singular present indicative, which is characteristic of West Saxon and Kentish texts of Old English, is generally considered to be an analogical introduction.¹ The usual explanation is that this -e was extended into the present indicative from the present optative—thus, for instance, Streitberg, Sievers, Wright.² Dieter, however, has proposed³ -e of the second and third person singular present indicative -es(t), -eð as an additional probable source of -e in the first person. I wish to present some evidence, hitherto unconsidered so far as I know, in support of the origin suggested by Dieter.

The evidence is of course inferential. Both the earlier present optative ending -æ from Germanic -ai and the earlier -i of the second and third persons indicative -is(t), -ið had become -e before the date of any surviving West Saxon or Kentish documents that contain first person singular indicative forms. Nor are there any abnormal forms in early West Saxon texts that throw light on the problem; except for a single *ne cweðo ic*, the ending of the first

¹ Kluge alone, so far as I know, holds differently. In his "Geschichte der englischen Sprache," *Grundriss*², p. 1067, he states: "Im Westsächsischen herrscht früh -e (*bīnde, hýre*), das an *a* in aslov. *berq* erinnert."

² Streitberg, *Urgermanische Grammatik* [Heidelberg, 1896], p. 320: "Der gewöhnliche ae. Ausgang westsächs. -e ist wohl vom optativ übernommen." Sievers, *Angelsächsische Grammatik*, 3te Auflage, [Halle, 1898], p. 189: "In den südlichen dialekten ist sie [the original ending *u, o*] dagegen so frühzeitig durch die optativ-endung verdrängt worden, dass diese für das ws. und kent. als die normalform zu betrachten ist." Wright, *Old English Grammar* [Oxford, 1908], p. 239: "The Anglian dialect mostly preserved the *u(o)*, but in early WS. and Ken. its place was taken by -e from the pres. subjunctive."

³ *Laut- und Formenlehre der altgermanischen Dialekte* [Leipzig, 1900], p. 87: "Awests. meist *e* (wohl durch angleichung an die 2. 3. pers. sing. auf -est, -eð, und an den optativ auf -e) dafür [for proper *u(o)*] eingetreten ist."

person is consistently *-e* in the Alfredian material.⁴ The late Northumbrian texts, however, illustrate very strikingly the manner in which the vowels of personal endings were confused and transferred in a dialect the grammar of which was not thoroughly conventionalized. These Northumbrian texts show an unmistakable tendency to carry the vowel of the second and third persons singular into the first person; they thus exemplify in this dialect precisely the kind of extension suggested by Dieter for West Saxon and Kentish.

This tendency is perhaps most obvious in the *Lindisfarne Gloss*.⁵

In this, as in the other late Northumbrian texts, the earlier conjugational system is in process of disintegration, and in consequence there is great confusion of flexional vowels, *e* and *a* being frequently interchanged. There is, however, still clearly evident a strong feeling for the earlier distribution of *-e* in strong verbs and in those of Class I weak in the second and third persons singular, and of *-a* in Class II weak verbs. For strong and Class I weak verbs the figures are 756 *-es(t)*, *-eð* and 293 *-as(t)*, *-að*; for Class II weak 53 *-es(t)*, *-eð* and 201 *-as(t)*, *-að*. The present optative—singular and plural are indistinguishable in form—of strong and Class I weak verbs ends 207 times in *-e* and 96 in *-a*; that of Class II weak 15 times in *-e* and 34 in *-a*. In the first person present indicative the endings of strong and class I weak verbs are 336-*o*, 1-*u*, 17-*e* and 13-*a*; in Class II weak 15-*o*, 1-*e*, and 16-*a*. The especially significant forms in this tabulation are those of Class II weak verbs. In the first person of the indicative, *-a* belonging properly to the second and third persons has supplanted the normal ending *-o* in half the total occurrences. It might be contended that this first person *-a* did not come from the second and third *-as(t)*, *-að*, but was merely an extension of the optative ending, which in much the greater number of cases also appeared as *-a*. But the fact that in the first person of the indicative *-e* occurs only once as compared with 16 instances of *-a*, whereas in the optative *-e* occurs as often as 15 times compared with 34 instances of *-a* discredits this contention; so negligible a pro-

⁴ P. J. Cosijn, *Altwestsächsische Grammatik*, 2te Hälfte, [Haag, 1886], pp. 122, 143 ff., 152 ff., 181.

⁵ See Theodor Kolbe: *Die Konjugation der Lindisfarner Evangelien*, Bonner Studien zur englischen Philologie, V [Bonn, 1912], pp. 107 ff.

portion of first person indicative forms in *-e* could hardly have existed with so large a proportion of optatives in *-e* if the indicative ending were merely an extension of the optative. Kolbe,⁶ following Sievers, is inclined to regard as optatives the first person forms in *-e* belonging to strong verbs—and I infer those of Class I weak as well—or, following Carpenter,⁷ as weakened from *-o* in unstressed position. The suggestion that these forms are optatives apparently is not due to any syntactic consideration but is merely an attempt to explain exceptional occurrences. I consider that both the forms in *-e* and those in *-a* resulted from an extension of the vowel of the second and third persons into the first—of precisely the same kind as the obvious extension pointed out in weak verbs of Class II. It is possible that in the spoken dialect of the date of *Lindisfarne* the unstressed vowels had weakened to a neutral sound represented in writing by *e*, but it is unnecessary to invoke such a weakening in order to explain the first person forms in *-e*.

In the *Durham Ritual*⁸ the situation is in general very much the same as in *Lindisfarne*, though the extension from the second and third persons is less strikingly obvious. The endings of these persons in strong and Class I weak verbs are 67 *-es(t)*, *-eð*, and 15 *-as(t)*, *-að*; in Class II weak Lindelöf has recorded 50 forms in *-as(t)*, *-að* (there are apparently other occurrences of *gigladas*), and only 6 forms in *-es(t)*, *-eð*. Though Lindelöf has made no effort to record all the present optative forms and it is thus impossible to make any accurate comparison of *-e* and *-a* endings, it is clear that in strong verbs and those of Class I weak *-e* greatly preponderates, and that in Class II weak *-a* is several times as numerous as *-e*. In the first person singular present indicative of strong and Class I weak verbs 15 occurrences of *-o* are cited; there are also 5 forms in *-e*, 4 of which Lindelöf thinks may have been misconstrued by the glosser as optatives, and 1 in *-a* which he thinks may have been similarly misconstrued. In weak verbs of Class II the first person ending “in der Mehrzahl der Fälle” appears as *-o(-igo)*. Of this ending 7 instances are recorded with apparently

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁷ H. C. A. Carpenter, *Deklination in der nordhumbrischen Evangelienübersetzung der Lindisfarner HS.*, Bonner Studien zur englischen Philologie, II [Bonn, 1910].

⁸ See Uno Lindelöf, *Die Sprache des Rituals von Durham* [Helsingfors, 1890], pp. 72-76.

other occurrences of *halsigo*; the number of forms in *-a* is 3—a high proportion of the whole; and there is 1 ending in *-e*. In the *Ritual* as in *Lindisfarne* there is thus a manifest tendency in Class II weak verbs to carry the vowel of the second and third persons into the first. The first person forms in *-e* and *-a* which occur in strong and Class I weak verbs and which Lindelöf thinks may have been misconstrued as optatives are probably, I think, merely similar extensions.

The third Northumbrian text is *Rushworth*², the Northumbrian portion of the gloss to the gospels contained in the Rushworth MS.³ In this text strong and Class I weak verbs in the second and third persons singular end about 494 times in *-es(t)*, *-eð* and about 65 times in *-as(t)*, *að*; Class II weak verbs end 83 times in *-as(t)*, *-að*, and only 3 times in *-es*, *-eð*. In the present optative, strong verbs end about 100 times in *-e*, once (singular) in *-a*, and once (plural) in *-o* and Class I weak verbs end without exception in *-e*; in Class II weak verbs, together with 8 singular and 7 plural optatives in *-e*, there are 4 plurals in *-a*. In the first person singular present indicative, strong and Class I weak verbs end about 265 times in *-o*, 6 in *-u*, 9 in *-e*, and once in *-a*;¹⁰ whereas in weak verbs of Class II the first person ends in *-o* 18 or 19 times, in *-e* not at all, and in *-a* 3 times—again a considerable proportion. The significance of the facts that in the first person indicative *-e* occurs only in strong and Class I weak verbs, in which *-es(t)*, *-eð* is eight times as frequent in the second and third persons as is *-as(t)*, *-að*; that in Class II weak, in which the second and third persons in *-as(t)*, *-að* are twenty times as numerous as those in *-es(t)*, *-eð*, the ending of the first person in a considerable proportion of the total occurrences is *-a*; and that in this same Class II weak, whereas the optative in four-fifths of the total occurrences ends in *-e* (exclusively so in the singular), the first person does not show a single instance of this characteristic optative ending—the significance of these facts as to the displacement of the original first person singular indicative ending not by that of the optative

² See Uno Lindelöf, *Die Südnordhumbrische Mundart des 10. Jahrhunderts; die Sprache der sog. Glosse Rushworth*², Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik X [Bonn, 1901], pp. 128 ff.

¹⁰ The only first person in *-a* is *forleta*, which also has *-as* twice in the second and third persons.

but by the vowel of the second and third persons of the indicative is, I think, inescapable.

The evidence of each of the three Northumbrian texts thus points in the same direction. In all three combined, in the second and third persons singular the earlier and normal distribution of *-e* in strong and Class I weak verbs and of *-a* in Class II weak verbs is preserved in about four-fifths of the total number of instances. In the first person, *-o* is the usual ending of all verbs. But, besides *-o*, the first person of strong and Class I weak verbs ends 31 times in *-e* and 15 times in *-a*; Class II weak verbs end 22 times in *-a* and only 2 times in *-e*. The fact that these endings are thus distributed clearly indicates in this dialect a trend toward the formation of new first person endings by extending the vowel of the second and third persons singular indicative into the first person. In all classes of verbs this tendency is strongly indicated; in Class II weak verbs it is obvious and unmistakable.

The same kind of extension as that I have pointed out in Northumbrian gave, I believe, the first person singular indicative ending *-e* in West Saxon and Kentish. Northumbrian shows unmistakably in Class II weak verbs a tendency to supplant the normal *-o* of the first person by *-a* from the second and third, and, to a much less degree, in strong and Class I weak verbs to carry the vowel of the second and third person endings into the first person. The stronger tendency to extend *-a* may have been furthered by the analogy of the normal plural *-að* of all verbs. In West Saxon and Kentish I believe that when the earlier *-u(o)* of the first person present indicative disappeared or was supplanted in strong and Class I weak verbs, the new ending was merely an extension of the vowel of the second and third persons—precisely as in the Northumbrian texts considered in this paper the ending of the first person in Class II weak verbs was in process of being supplanted. When in West Saxon and Kentish this new ending had once established itself in strong and Class I weak verbs, by a natural functional analogy it was extended to Class II weak verbs as well. This process of extension may well have been aided by the analogy of the optative ending after both the earlier optative *-æ* and the earlier indicative *-i* had become *-e*, but actual evidence of this influence of the optative is not found in Old English texts of any dialect. On the other hand, in a period of unstable grammatical forms, the Northum-

brian texts appear to show clearly both an absence of tendency to carry the optative ending into the first person of the indicative,¹¹ and a strong tendency to extend the vowel of the second and third persons singular indicative into the first person.

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¹¹ Note especially the forms in *Lindisfarne*, p. 454 above, and in *Rushworth*, p. 456 above.